IN MESOPOTAMIA

MARTIN SWAYNE

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THE GARDEN OF EDEN, KURNA.

IN MESOPOTAMIA

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BY

MARTIN SWAYNE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LORD RICHARD IN THE PANTRY

THE SPORTING INSTINCT

CUPID GOES NORTH

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IN MESOPOTAMIA

I

THE GATEWAY OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

THERE is nothing to suggest that you are approaching the gateway of the Garden of Eden when you reach the top of the Persian Gulf, unless the sun be that Flaming Sword which turns every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life. Of cherubim we could see no signs. We lay motionless awaiting orders by wireless. Of the country before us we knew next to nothing. We did not grasp that the great river at whose mouth we lay was called

the Shatt-el-Arab and not the Tigris; and I do not think that a single one of us possessed a copy of the "Arabian Nights." Few of us knew anything about the gun-running troubles in the Persian Gulf of recent years, and of the exploits of the Royal Indian Marine.

The approach to the Shatt-el-Arab is remarkably featureless. After the stark fissured coast hills of Persia and the strip of red Arabian coast that marks Kuweit, the mouth of the river appeared as a yellow line on the horizon intersected by the distant sails of fishing boats. At the bar where the sand has silted, a few steamers were lying. A steam yacht flying the White Ensign, with a pennant that trailed almost down to her decks, showing the length of service she had seen, passed us and dropped her anchor a mile to the south. The silence was only broken by the clacking of the fans in the saloon. One gazed listlessly westwards at

the quivering haze that veiled Kuweit. There was a rumour that the ship's launch was going there with a party of nurses and a sharp voice sounded : " Nobody allowed on shore without a helmet." But it was too hot to move. At length a fishing boat emerged from the haze and slowly approached, rowed by four Arabs. It drew alongside, a spot of vivid colour against the dark sea. In it were half a dozen big fish. The Arabs began to harangue the occupants of the lower deck. We watched them curiously, perhaps wondering if they had poisoned the fish. The Tommies stared at them in silence. They were the first inhabitants of the country that we had seen.

The business of transhipping at the bar is a burden to all concerned. A steamer of shallower draught came alongside, and the derricks started to grind and clatter, and the big crates swung up from one hold and plunged

down into the other for hour after hour. A squall arose and the ships had to part company and we lay for two days tossing and rolling in a dun-coloured atmosphere. Then once more we joined up, and the unloading continued of the four hundred tons of equipment, which had already been dumped on shore at Alexandria. It is a costly business bringing out a hospital to these parts. About midday we weighed anchor on the new ship, and crept up the channel over the bar. There were no gas buoys to mark its course, and Fao, which lies near the mouth of the river, had no lighthouse, so night traffic was presumably impossible.

The sudden sight of the belts of palm trees, the occasional square mud dwellings, and the steamy, hot-house look of the banks came as a surprise. Those of us who had been to the Dardanelles had half expected that this end of Turkey would be much like the other—

broken country and sandy scrub, with hills. But here is only a broad swift river, a strip of vivid green verdure, and beyond the immense plain stretching to the horizon. In the stream was a small tug bearing the letters A.P.O.C. At Abadan we saw the big circular tanks of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company where the oil from Ahwaz, which travels through miles of piping, is refined. Above Abadan, which is just a cluster of circular tanks, slender chimneys and square houses on the arid plain, with a mass of barges lining the numerous wharfs, we passed Mohammerah. On the opposite bank —the west bank is called the right bank—you can see the Turkish trenches where they opposed our first advance among the palms at the battle of Sahil on November 16th, 1914, with a force of five thousand men and twelve guns. The ground is intersected with narrow creeks cut for irrigation purposes; and the trenches

form little crescent-shaped depressions almost hidden by the reeds and grasses. From the ship it looks a lush green country here, for there are rice fields dotted about and the river broadens out and surrounds an emerald island. Our 4,000 ton vessel swept up-stream at a speed of ten knots, with a great wash spreading behind her, and her funnels towering high above the palms. Our destination was reached at six in the evening, about sixty miles from the mouth of the river, and the whole way up the scene had been practically unvarying—river and plain, and countless palms. We had passed the vessels sunk by the Turks to bar the progress of the original expedition. Masts and a funnel are visible, standing clear of the main channel.

Basra was like coming on a bit of the London Thames from a distance. Lines of big ships appeared suddenly, round a bend of the river,

anchored in mid-stream. There were hospital ships, cargo vessels, transports, war-ships, monitors, tugs, river-boats, oil-driven lighters —the ones we made the landing from at Suvla, with a coat of new paint and the letters ML instead of K—barges, launches, native dhows— which travel to Mombasa and Bombay—and innumerable lesser craft. Basra itself lies up a creek, and is invisible from the river. What you see on the shore is properly called Ashar, but the two places merge into one another. Owing to the absolute flatness of the country, a sense of smallness is produced everywhere. There is no background to give perspective, and the great breadth of the sable river dwarfs the shore.

We dropped anchor a little below the town, near Korah creek. It was Sunday and at that time it was still the custom of the inhabitants of Basra to collect on the banks of the creek

and hold a kind of social parade from which the suggestion of a slave market was not entirely absent. There was a continual procession of boats and painted *belums*, the native gondola, long and narrow, with curved ends, and either rowed or poled by two *belumchis*. In them were fair-skinned, unveiled women with many bangles on their arms, wearing robes of dark brilliant hues. On the shore, under the palms, wandered a crowd of white-robed Arabs, with red or blue turbans. Occasionally one saw a khaki uniform. It was intensely hot and damp. A haze lay over the further reaches of the river, and the sky had a brassy look unlike the intense turquoise clarity of the Egyptian sky. The palm fronds seemed metallic. As far as the eye could see along the right bank lay a confused mass of low white buildings, tents, huts of yellow matting and piles of stores. Gangs of Arabs

Towing on the Tigris.

and Indian coolies were at work at the low wooden landing stage, and over the scene towered the gaunt masts of the wireless station. The left bank was chiefly palm grove, save for a gap where stood a big building taken over by our flying men.

A military authority came on board, wondering whether we were a cargo of wood or mules. A hospital had not been expected, and we passed the next day in idleness. On the third day our four hundred tons of stuff were swung off into *mahallas*, the native barges, which are wide craft decorated with carving and paint, both stem and stern pointed and high out of the water, and amidships close down to the water-line. The Arabs squatting on the painted poops of these ships seemed sullen. They looked as cut-throat a lot as you could desire. When the boats were loaded up they drifted off, and by means of a tattered bit

of sacking for a sail, and a long pole, managed to reach their destination somehow. It was curious to see these primitive craft filled with the black cases of the precious X-ray plant.

The creeks round Ashar branch off at right angles to the Shatt-el-Arab at intervals of a few hundred yards, and extend for two or three miles inland. They are broad and richly bordered with palms and pomegranate. In places a network of vines festoons the trunks. A yellow tinge in the heart of the palms showed the coming crop of dates. Seen in a picture these creeks are idyllic, winding broad, calm and peaceful through the groves. Slim boats glide up and down them, nut-brown children splash in them, and women, veiled in black, come from the little villages to draw water in brass vessels at their margins with graceful movements.

We landed from a roomy barge with a tug fastened alongside. The men were cheery, and a mouth-organ and a mandoline wafted us on. Something dark and indeterminate swept by on the swift current. It was said to be the body of a dead Turk, bound for the Persian Gulf, after its voyage of two hundred odd miles from Kut. We landed, uncomfortably hot. The men fell in and we prepared to march off. A swarthy Arab, in red and white headgear held in position by two thick rings of camel hair, wearing curved slippers and saffron-coloured robes, stood scowling before us, spitting at intervals. A group of sappers near by seemed unaffected by his behaviour. The scowl and the spitting seem merely habits, induced by the country. But it is necessary to orientate oneself very carefully in the East. A long tramp followed up Dusty Lane, between scorching mud walls. We passed dirty booths,

naked children with frizzy hair, thin faced women with swaggering hips, and occasional military police in shirt-sleeves carrying thick sticks. The sight of a large cat sitting in a niche, blinking in that excellent manner of inward ecstasy, was cheering. On, beyond the town the march continued, the sweat pouring off us, and tunics becoming stained with dark patches—through the camp area, past Indian troops; past horses, tossing and switching, surrounded by clouds of flies; past bullocks, huge, delicately pastel-tinted beasts, sprawling under the feathery palms; past screaming mules, motor lorries, wayside canteens and squads of men, until Makina Plain came in sight. It was in this neighbourhood that our site lay, alongside a creek where a liquorice factory had been in the days of peace. The first impression was desolating. The place looked like a bricklayer's yard. A glance was

sufficient to estimate it would take many long weeks before it was completed for use. Several large iron-roofed sheds stood by the water's edge. Gangs of Arabs were at work; strings of donkeys carrying mud raised the dust in heavy clouds; carpenters in blue trousers hammered and sawed; planks, bricks, barrels of concrete, and piles of matting littered the ground: and upon all the vertical rays of the sun beat down unmercifully. The creek was full of the *mahallas* that had brought up our equipment, and for the rest of that day our men toiled and sweated over the crates and boxes, and bedsteads and bales of blankets, singing in monotone a rhythmic refrain in imitation of the native coolies when carrying loads. The native chants are simple.

Singer: "To-morrow we will eat rice and meat!"

Chorus: "May Allah grant it!"

Singer : " We are doing a great deal of work!"

Chorus : " May Allah reward us ! "

* * * * *

The Tommies' refrain was more picturesque. Imagine six men carrying a crate.

Singer : (Softly) " Is it 'ot ? " (Pause.)

Chorus : " I don't think ! "

Singer : (Fuller and staccato) " 'Ot as 'ell ? "

Chorus : " I don't think ! " etc.

General Chorus : (repeatedly, with passion).

" Aller, Oller, Aller !

Oh, Aller, Oller, Aller !

Aller, Oller Oo ! "

Bully beef came along in the afternoon, and we had landed with full water-bottles, for drinking water was unavailable. Towards evening some double-roofed tents were run up. The men settled down in the empty sheds alongside the creek. We got to bed in a thunderstorm—a vivid zigzag banging affair

that circled round most of the night. The rain turned the ground into something beyond description as regards its slippery properties. Only a native donkey can keep footing in such ground. There is no road metal available in Mesopotamia. It is a stoneless place. The frogs trumpeted in chorus all night; packs of dogs or jackals swept about in droves, once at full pelt through our tent, like devils of the storm. It was nightmarish, but sleep brought that wonderful balancing force that sometimes clothes itself in dreams, and steeps the spirit in all that is lacking. Just before falling asleep I reflected that Adam and Eve might well have been excused in such a country.

II

BASRA

We reached Mesopotamia when the hot weather was beginning. The campaign to relieve Kut was at its height, and the wounded and sick were coming down river in thousands. Apart from these there were big reinforcement camps on Makina Plain, and all around us the daily sick rate was rapidly increasing, and men straight from England, unused to hot climates, were being sent in big batches off the incoming transports. There was very little ice to be had, and so far as we were concerned there were no fans, electric or otherwise, with which to ventilate the sheds.

The urgency of the situation demanded that we should open what wards we could for the reception of sick and wounded at once. We had no nurses, partly because there was no accommodation for them. Four sheds alongside the creek were got in order. Iron bedsteads draped in white, mosquito nets resembling bridal veils, bedside tables, and cupboards arranged themselves in rows. An immense hammering and shouting filled the stifling air. The sheds began to look moderately inviting—neat and clean, smelling faintly of antiseptics which smelt better than the things in the creek. At first about fifty beds were put into each shed; in a short time beds were crowded into every available corner of the clearing. Fresh sheds were being erected by natives. Since the ground was undermined by marsh, the sheds had to be built on piles driven six feet into the spongy soil. There was only one pile driver,

which resembled a cross-section of a lamp post, and was worked by a fatigue party of wild-haired Indian troops from Afghanistan regions. One would have thought from their flashing eyes when the pile driver crashed home that they played a secret game in which each imagined his bitterest enemy was in the place of the pile.

The problem of water arose at once. There was no general water supply at that time, and each unit had to solve its own problem. Our supply had to come from the creek, which was thick and turbid and contained a multitude of unsavoury things. At first it was sedimented with alum, which precipitated the suspended matter in a gelatinous mass, and the clear fluid was chlorinated with bleaching powder. There is only one consolation in drinking well chlorinated water. You know that it contains nothing except chlorine. With

whisky it forms a mixture that it is difficult to describe. After a time two tanks were put in order and arranged on brick furnaces, and from a third tank water that had been allowed to settle was run off and boiled. These were satisfactory. An hour's exposure of the boiling water in jars of porous clay—chatties—made it decently cool. Chatties of great size were procured from the bazaar and placed outside each ward. Nowadays water comes in pipes from the Shatt-el-Arab, being taken from the middle layer, which is clearest. The best water comes from the Euphrates, which joins the yellow Tigris at Kurna about forty miles above Basra. It sends down a tributary which flows into the Tigris a few miles above Basra. From here water could have been conveyed in pipes. But the scheme was thought unnecessarily elaborate and costly.

It must be remembered that in a place like Mesopotamia water is the main problem. A clear, clean, pure water supply means an incalculable saving of life. A dirty supply may mean the failure of the campaign. In order to get good water for troops nothing should be neglected or overlooked, and no kind of compromise should be permitted. There is perhaps not a single act in war more criminal and more worthy of death than to allow troops to muddle along and get what water they can, under local arrangements, when a pure central supply is possible.

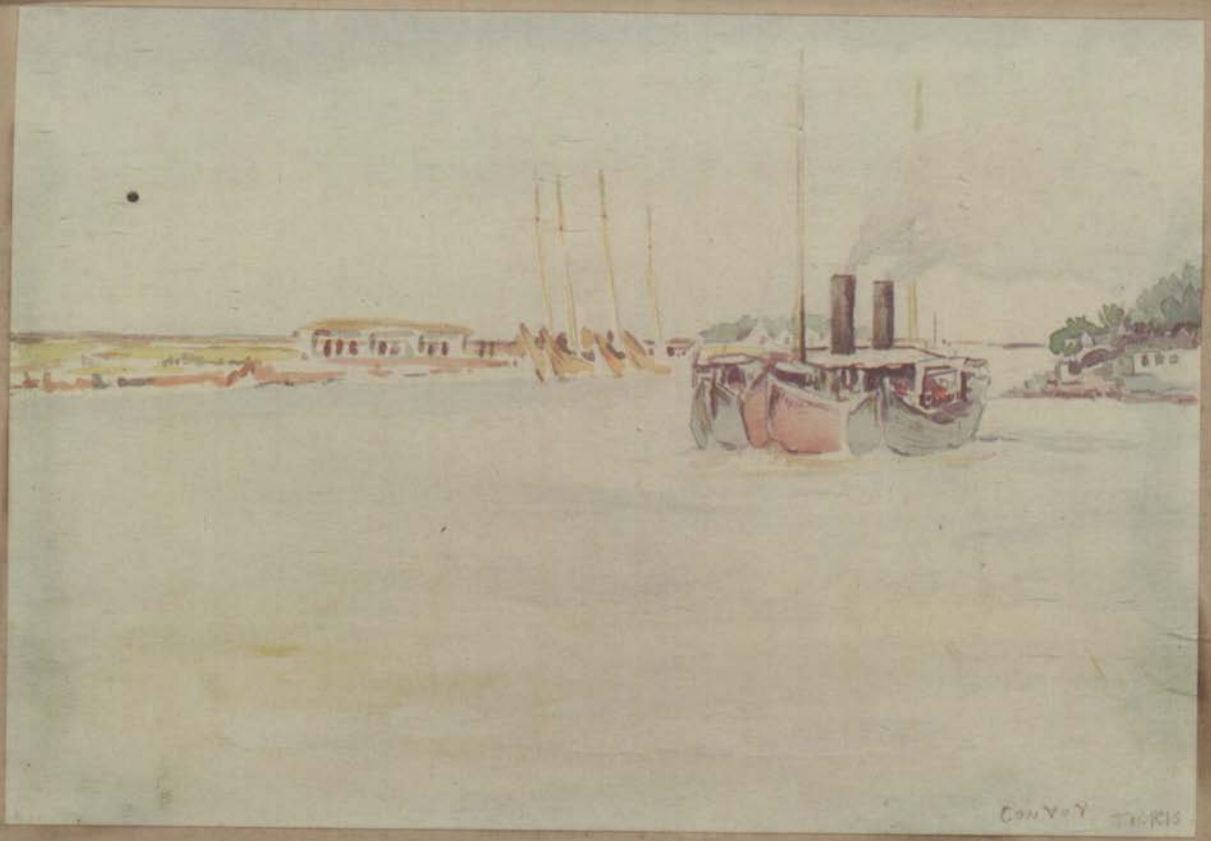
Sick Tommies in tropical climates appreciate soda water. At first we were told to get our supply from a native in the bazaar at Ashar. The problem at this time did not concern the soda water but the bottles. There was a great shortage of soda water bottles in Mesopotamia. Breaks and bursts were frequent, and it

seemed impossible to import any new ones, and they cost about sixpence each. Our hospital was situated at a considerable distance from the town. We were not allowed a motor launch, and the roads were often impassable for bullock tongas, owing to the floods which were then prevalent. Soda water was therefore fetched by *belum*. You were poled down the creek to the river, and rowed through the maze of traffic to Ashar creek. Turning out of the broad swift river, up the noisy creek you came on the riverside cafés, built on piles and filled with splenetic-eyed Arabs sipping coffee and various coloured sweet drinks. A cheap gramophone playing a thin Eastern music, may be sounding. The conversation is animated and guttural, constantly interspersed with that hollow, metallic rasp that is like the noise of an engine exhaust. The town is of white mud and stone, with wooden balconies

painted a vivid blue, and flat roofs. A minaret rises behind it with a blue-tiled extremity supporting the upraised hand and crescent. The streets are narrow and airless. In the shops are a mass of articles of all descriptions: tinned stuff, tobacco, clocks, hair-oil, cheap jewellery, odd bottles of doubtful wine, scent, rugs, copper vessels, sweets, sauces, pickles. Innumerable flies surround everything. On much of the tinned stuff were very old labels. No man of experience up-country in India will touch tinned stuff of that description. The soda water factory was in a small courtyard. There was a big green gasometer of carbon dioxide, a glittering brass-bound pump and a filling apparatus. Three tubs were on the floor containing a blue, a red and a clear fluid. These, said the Arab proprietor, were English disinfectants in which the bottles were rinsed. Here you waited until

your bottles were refilled, at one anna (one penny) each. This represented a profit of 1,200 per cent. The water which was used for filling them was taken from the centre of the Tigris. Ice was obtained elsewhere, made from an ammonia plant, in bars two feet by six inches. The necessity for ice was imperative, but it could only be supplied in small quantities then. These native plants were mostly taken over by the military as time went on. A single bad heat-stroke case would often use up the whole day's supply to the hospital. That was why ice was an imperative necessity. It meant so many lives saved. In India ice is manufactured by machines in quantity wherever it is required.

After soda water, the sick Tommy requires certain delicacies in food. Eggs and chickens and fruit and vegetables were necessary. The quartermaster soon began to lift up his voice.



A Convoy of Sick and Wounded.

What with the supply and transport depots of the Indian Army and our own Army Service Corps, and the inevitable confusion of two different Army systems, he became extremely irritable. This confusion existed in every department. On the medical side, there was the British scale of field ambulances and hospitals, and this differs entirely from the Indian scale. What could have been more suitable for muddling than this? Its effects could be seen in the expression of the quarter-master.

I can see him clearly, a plump, stocky man, with arms akimbo, his helmet on the back of his head, the flesh of his face in folds of disgust with sweat pouring off him, and his once elegant waxed moustache drooping, saying in a chant: "The man who gets me out to this —— country again isn't born yet." That was when the bullock tongas, after travelling over

the surface of this cradle of the earth all day in search of certain supplies, returned empty. Chickens and eggs were local produce. The natives put fancy prices on things. What we paid was supposed to be a controlled price. It must be remembered that we introduced a lot of money into the country, and entirely changed the financial standards of the Arabs. Arab coolies got tenpence a day—that is, their pay was not far short of the European Tommy. Sometimes they struck for higher wages. It did not breed a good spirit, but it may have been the best spirit under the circumstances. It was, at times, necessary to use violence to *belumchis*, who insolently demanded absurd charges, and a certain padre gained respect by administering a severe thrashing to one of these rascals. When the Russians came down, one of them was obstructed for a moment by an Arab on the river bank. The Russian officer—

a big fellow—picked him up and threw him into the river.

The chickens were poor. Three might weigh in the aggregate a pound and a half. The supply of eggs was limited when procured through contractors, but it was possible to obtain a few from other sources. As regards fruit, there was practically none. Potatoes were procurable in this part, but not higher up the river. Owing to the intense heat and lack of storage accommodation, vast quantities of food perished. Piles of boxes containing cigarettes, that had lain in the sun, were found to contain nothing but fine dust on being opened. It was the same way with biscuits. Potatoes rotted in millions. The whole problem was one of immense difficulty. The milk that was used was almost wholly tinned. The use of fresh milk which was tried later at Amara was not a very successful experiment. It required

careful boiling, and often curdled in mass. It was then boiled in a large number of small vessels, with better results, but the supply drawn from outlying villages, and brought down by river, was never adequate, and boiled milk is not very pleasant. Bread was baked in the neighbourhood by army bakers, and eventually, when proper ovens were made, was good. Sugar was plentiful, sandy in colour, and full of extraneous matter, but quite adequate. There was no shortage in tea. Fresh meat was a ration in Basra, but Indian cooks seemed to make a better job of it than British. It was tough and stringy and required a great deal of stewing. Rice was an occasional ration in Basra, and a daily ration higher up, where it took the place of potatoes. Lime juice, as a ration, was very uncertain. It was possible to get it in the bazaar, and the Tommy could get it at the Y.M.C.A. huts.

Of these huts it is impossible to speak too highly. The Tommy alone knows what he would have done without them. You drank, in the hot weather, amazing quantities of fluid, and lime juice and water was the usual mixture until the sun went down. One paid two shillings and eightpence—two rupees—for one of those long, narrow, golden bottles, with leaves and fruit moulded on their exterior. Wines and spirits could be ordered through agents in Basra from Bombay at reasonable rates. Bombay is about five days by steamer from Basra. It was almost a universal experience to find alcohol necessary in the evening. The mind was exhausted, food was unattractive, conversation was impossible, the passage of time immeasurably slow, and a restless irritation pervaded one until a dose of alcohol was taken. Its effect was humanising. Still, it is worth remembering that the Prophet

forbade alcohol to the people of the country. But then he permitted other things.

Owing to the complaints about food supplies, in the early part of June, in the second year of the campaign, there was published an order that all troops were to have certain fruit and vegetable variations in diet. Lists of articles were given, and the scale was very generous and sensible. The actual supply of the stuff, however, did not come as we might have been led to expect. This was because most of the articles in the lists were starred, which meant that they were only supplied when available, and I suppose India, which had to run several other expeditions besides Mesopotamia, could not possibly produce enough material to satisfy all requirements. At this time, too, many of the cargo vessels were occupied in bringing immense supplies of wood from India, and the local produce of Mesopotamia did not go nearly

far enough for the purpose. Some officers planted various seeds in patches adjoining their quarters, but the business of watering them was troublesome. A ration of fresh limes was served to our men on the 21st of June for the first time, but the supply of these ran out the next day. Some of the men retained these small, wrinkled fruits as curiosities. Fish, an intermediate diet for intestinal cases, was sorely missed. But it was quite out of the question. The river fish, of course, were fairly numerous, but the uncertainty of their supply was too great, and they had to be cooked very soon after being caught. There was always a great deal of amateur angling in the evenings, and in the creek by our hospital a kind of mud fish was caught, full of small, apparently unattached bones, and tasting flat and stale.

It is curious to reflect that, in the second

year of the campaign, this great country of future agricultural development which is traversed by immense volumes of water and whose atmosphere resembles that of a hothouse, could not produce sufficient fruit or vegetables to supply the relatively small military forces it contained. For these forces, if stretched out along one bank in single file, each man at arm's length from his fellow, would not nearly have reached from the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab to Basra itself. And the front lay more than two hundred miles above Basra.

III

THE SICK AND WOUNDED

THE sick and wounded began to arrive as soon as the wards were ready, coming up the creek in boats from the convoys that were in the river. The convoys consisted of river boats with a big barge lashed on each side. The steamers were taken from many quarters, from the great rivers of India, from the Nile —some saw service in the Nile War—and from the Thames. Some were local and belonged to Messrs. Lynch, who ran a service to Baghdad before the war. Some burned coal and some oil. A large convoy—that is the steamer and its two lateral barges—might carry three or

four hundred cases in emergencies. The time they took to travel from the front down to Basra, which is a distance of about two hundred miles, depended very much on the luck they experienced in getting through the Narrows. The passage of this bit of the river will be described in a later page. Three days was a pretty quick journey. Travelling by night was impossible. In rounding the sharp bends of the river, which winds across the plain in a most extraordinary manner, these convoys often cannoned helplessly against the banks. At well-known cannoning places Arabs collected with baskets of eggs and chickens and melons for sale. The sick and wounded lay closely packed on the deck under a single thickness of canvas awning. In the great heat of midsummer this was insufficient protection, but it was impossible for the medical officers of the ships to obtain any extra canvas,

and it was thought that reed matting in close proximity to the funnels would be dangerous. Tinned milk for bad cases and bully beef, stew, and bread and jam for those fit to eat it were the main rations, but soup and eggs were often available. The difficulties of catering for a crowded convoy, with only a small galley, were considerable. Water was taken from the river, and chlorinated in tanks on board.

On reaching Basra the convoys discharged their patients either at the big British hospital, that was formerly the palace of a Sheik, and stands on the river's edge, or at one or other of the Indian hospitals that lie beside it. The accommodation for British troops was not great at the time, so that it was the custom to transfer cases as soon as possible into the hospital ships, which could come right alongside the piers, and send them to India. Our hospital

had four hundred beds available within a short period. As a matter of fact, many more were squeezed into odd places during times of pressure.

The appearance of the sick and wounded defies description. Like the Gallipoli lot, only worse, they were lean, gaunt, haggard skeletons, hollow-eyed, with rivulets of perspiration furrowing the dirt of their faces. Looking back from a better state of affairs to those days, the strange spectres that staggered off the boat become softened in outline. It is only by the aid of pen, pencil, brush or film that their grimness is kept alive in the mind.

They cheered up considerably after a day or two, and when it came to censoring their letters, not a word of complaint did one find; nor, for that matter, any news. The absence of nurses was a disappointment for them, but the luxury of a spring mattress, of cool water

in quantity, and of being under a roof out of the sun made up for that in some degree. They were full of rumours. Of the general situation they knew nothing. One said we had half a million men in the field. Another reckoned we had a division or two at the most. Many seemed to put the figure at six divisions. A British division is about eighteen thousand men, and an Indian division less. They were sure that Kut would be relieved. It was at the time when the news was looked for daily. The whole place was rich in tales. Every depot on shore, and every ship in the stream, had its stories. Kut was to be occupied by us on the following Sunday. General X had stated it quite decisively, with an elegant gesture of confidence. General Y had sworn it, banging the table. General Z had mentioned it casually, a cigar between his teeth. The Turks were hopelessly demoralised. They had

no ammunition, no food, and no heart. Hopes ran high, and everyone who came up from Ashar was eagerly questioned. We woke one morning to hear a great noise of steam sirens from the river, and for a time lay in blissful happiness, certain it could only mean one thing. It was like the night we lay on the Gallipoli sand some days after the landing, in the darkness, sipping our first tot of rum. Our hearts were merry, for had we not just heard that Achi Baba had fallen, that Bulgaria and Roumania had declared war on Turkey, and that the crackle of musketry to the north-east was due to certain Boers who were swarming up the heights overhanging the Kishlar Rocks? She must be a woman of temperament, Rumour, for when she smiles she is so charming; but when she frowns, who can be so ugly?

During this time considerable activity pre-

vailed throughout the Basra region. Near by, on Makina Plain, a vast flat expanse of bare earth beyond the shadow of the palm plantations, a perpetual dust arose. Transport columns, guns and troops were always on the move, and the camps grew in size until the whole place was dotted with white canvas and yellow matting huts. The skirling of the pipes, the beating of the drums, the sound of the bugle and the tramp of feet continually came from the road that ran along the bank opposite the hospital. Wagons rumbled over the wooden bridge, and the deep note of the incoming steamers reverberated over the groves. But a difficulty began to arise. All these incoming troops that were concentrating on the plain were new to the country. The heat was increasing rapidly. It had long passed the limits of the most intense English summer, and the mercury was now rising above 100 degrees

in the shade. The sky was cloudless and brassy. The floods each day left great areas of damp, steamy marsh when the tidal river fell. Mosquitoes were beginning to fill the night with their thin screaming. Small, almost impalpable, colourless insects, whose bite is like a red hot wire and who can penetrate the meshes of an ordinary mosquito net with ease, began to infest the place. These were sand-flies. They are surely the most successfully maddening insect ever designed by the Lord of Flies. They give rise to a malady known as sand-fly fever, which is like influenza and drains the body of all vitality for many days. In addition to this, either the food, the water, the dust, or the day flies were spreading about a form of diarrhœa which rapidly turned into dysentery. The day flies were a swiftly growing army. Breeding grounds in the surrounding camps, in the horse lines, the bullock

THE HOSPITAL WASHING.

lines and native villages were numerous. They were nothing like the flies at Mudros when the whole roof of a tent at night might be uniformly black with them, and eating was in the nature of a free fight. A couple of hundred or so to each tent was perhaps the average, but they made rest a matter of difficulty. The Red Cross fortunately supplied us with instruments of fly destruction, and later on fly experts were sent out.

The result of all this was that the curve of sickness began to mount steeply, and it became necessary to make some provision for the victims. Since our position was central as regards reinforcement camps, we were delegated to deal with local sick, and after that arrangement very few of the cases sent down from the front came our way. For the first few days the number of incoming sick could be dealt with adequately. But as time went on,

and the mercury rose higher and higher in the lifeless air, the number increased and became formidable. Long lines of ambulance wagons and bullock tongas crept steadily from every quarter to the hospital. Beds were crowded into every corner of the wards. We had no fans. Imagine, you who live in civilisation, what an electric fan may mean. You can see it spinning in the corner of your club or restaurant and think nothing of it. But in that place it meant the difference between life and death. Picture yourself tossing in a high fever in the centre of a stifling ward, with the temperature above 90 degrees all through the night, and not a breath of wind stirring. Then think what it would mean to find yourself placed suddenly under the whirling vanes of a big fan, lying with your mouth wide open, taking great gulps of the cool rushing air. When we moved up river, three months later,

it was rumoured the fans were on their way from India.

The maladies that were commonest were malaria, diarrhœa, dysentery, jaundice and heat-stroke. There were some scattered cases of cholera, and a few of typhoid. The typhoid began in earnest later on, as well as sand-fly fever. Besides these there was a skin disease which we called Basra sore—a very indolent ulcer which is not painful, but tends to spread over the legs and arms, leaving a flexible, bluish scar when it eventually heals. There was also an ill-defined syndrome, termed variously Mesopotamitis or acute debility, or the Fear of God. Officially one described it as the effects of heat. But of all these the most pitiful was heat-stroke.

IV

HEAT-STROKE

I DO not know of any other malady so dramatic, or so painful to witness, as heat-stroke, with the exception, perhaps, of acute cholera. It is something that belongs to Mesopotamia in a peculiar sense, in that it seems to express in visible and concentrated form the silent hostility of the country which was noticed by the ancients. For Mesopotamia welcomes no man. It is a profound enigma. What do those two gigantic rivers mean that rush through those vast stretches of barren land? For what ultimate destiny were

they designed? It is like looking on two enormous electric cables, carrying a current of incalculable amperage, lying beside a vast but motionless machinery, because no contact has been made. Whatever the answer may be it has been long in coming. Dwelling beside them, one cannot help speculating, for there is a kind of fatality that concerns the disposition of matter in Nature. Oil fields and rubber trees existed, one might say, as enigmas, until the internal combustion engine and motor cars dawned on the world and explained their riddle. This was their fate. And of Mesopotamia, who shall say that it may not be concerned with a yet unborn attitude in us Europeans when we will turn wholly to the produce of the earth?

To gain some idea of heat-stroke it is necessary to grasp the conditions that produce it.

A typical hot day begins with a dawn that comes as a sudden hot yellow behind the motionless palms. A glittering host of dragon-flies rises up from the swamps, wheeling and darting after the mosquitoes. In the growing light mysterious shapes slink past. They are the camp dogs returning from their sing-song, which has kept you awake half the night. Inside the mosquito net you see various gorged little insects struggling to get out of the meshing through which they passed so easily when they were slim and hungry. The hot beam of the sun picks out your tent, and the mercury goes up steadily. At five you are bathed in perspiration as you lie in bed. It has been in the neighbourhood of 90 degrees throughout the night; you have probably spent most of it smoking in a chair in the moonlight listening to horses whinnying, donkeys braying, dogs barking and yelping without a pause, and men

groaning and tossing in the steamy sick tents. The business of getting up is one of infinite weariness. There is nothing fresh in the morning feeling. At eight the mercury is probably 100 degrees. At times, as you dress after a tepid bath, it is necessary to sit down and take a rest. Your vesture is simple—a thin shirt, open at the collar, and a pair of shorts, stockings and shoes. During the day your feelings do not correspond to the height of the mercury, for after breakfast a certain amount of energy possesses you, and the morning's work becomes possible. But after a couple of hours, in the neighbourhood of eleven, when it may be anything from 110 to 120 degrees in the shade, a kind of enervation sets in. This is partly due to lack of food. For some reason we found it necessary to eat a considerable amount. The theory of a simple diet, a little fruit, meat once a day and

in small quantity, did not work out in practice. After midday the world is a blinding glare and the intake of air seems to burn the lungs. A comparative stillness descends on the scene. On the plain activities cease. Through the double canvas roofing of a tent the sun beats down like a giant with a leaden club. The temperature in the wards increases. At the worst moments you feel distinctly that it would be possible, by giving way to something that escapes definition, to go off your head. A spirit of indifference to everything is necessary. Any kind of worry is simply a mode of suicide. A man, for instance, who feels continually he ought to be up and doing, and that to lie still in vacancy is a sin, does not do well, unless, perhaps, he dwells in a cool stone house, under fans, with plenty of ice, as was the luck of some. There must be no inner conflicts. Cranks soon suffer. Life becomes simplified. An oriental

contempt of the West, with all its preoccupations, grows insensibly. When a dripping orderly came to rouse you to see some case, you understood perfectly the attitude of mind that has produced the idea of Kismet. Why move ? If the man dies, it is Allah's will. It is Allah's will that he is sick. Let him remain in the hands of Allah.

It was during the afternoon and evening that heat-stroke occurred in the main when the humidity of the air began to go up. A great many of the new troops had no idea of the danger of the sun. The Tommy does not estimate a situation very quickly. The attempt to change the main meal of the day to an evening hour did not meet with success, and during the afternoon the men would sit bucking away in their tents, and refuse to adapt themselves to the idea of a siesta. Moreover, the Tommy is obstinate by nature and does not

like to give in. He goes on marching in the sun, even though he feels bad, and the collapse is swift and fatal.

At about five o'clock, with the temperature falling and the humidity of the air increasing, a period of intense discomfort set in. Perspiration was so profuse that clothes became wringing wet like bathing suits, even if you were sitting still. A kind of air hunger ensued. The few birds in the groves sat with their beaks wide open. It was then that the ambulance wagons began to roll in with their burden of heat-stroke cases, and continued until after sunset. It is a malady which, as I have said, is dramatic and painful to witness. . . .

A heat-stroke station was prepared at the water's edge containing a couple of baths and an ice chest, and patients were put into the chill water as soon as possible. They were

slapped and punched and laved till they began to turn blue and the temperature fell. Then they were put in a blanket, if any collapse showed, or just left naked on a bed in the open. Fear played a powerful part in the malady. It tended to produce it and to cause relapses, and it was good practice to use direct counter-suggestion whenever the patient was conscious, as well as brandy and morphia. The worst of it was that many of those patients who recovered over night died next afternoon as they lay in the suffocating ward. What was possible with wet sheets and small pieces of ice was done, but it was a wretched business, and those who were in Basra at that time and saw those spectacles will never forget them; nor will they forget the silent, impotent rage that filled the mind at the thought of the giant-bodied, small-headed Colossus of war which makes a useless sacrifice of men in ways

such as these every day. But it had one useful effect, perhaps. A really Zoroastrian reverence for the sun came after seeing a case, and a man learnt to look on his pith helmet and spine pad as his best friends.

V

MIRAGE

On the 28th of April, after a week of conflicting rumours, we heard that Kut had fallen. As a nation we take reverses with consummate coolness. Whatever one thought inwardly, work went on as usual, and in the men's lines there was very little comment. Up to the last moment Rumour was optimistic. She spread a most mysterious yarn about the ship that tried to escape Turkish vigilance and get to Kut with supplies. It was, she said, full of gold. For what purpose she did not specify, but it sounded promising. This was her last fling. After that she changed her mask and looked

ugly. Forty thousand Arabs were mustering at Kuweit. German cruisers were in the Persian Gulf, sinking shipping right and left. The Turks were coming down on Nasireyah in tremendous force. Trouble was brewing at Shaiba. In the last respect she proved correct, though the trouble was not great. At Shaiba, which lies about twenty miles west of Basra across the plain, a remarkable battle was fought in the April of the year before. A Turkish force of twelve thousand regulars and thirty odd guns, with numerous Arabs, was routed at an extreme and critical moment, it is said, owing to a mistake. The mistake, for once, was on the part of the Turks. Fighting had been very severe. We had no reserves and things were looking black. Numerous Arab tribesmen who had remained as neutral spectators were beginning to take it into their heads that we were losing, and that only means one thing to them.

Donkey Labour in the Heat of the Day.

It means they at once join forces with the victorious side, and add their ghastly devilry to the general merriment. The Turks, under Suleiman Askari, had been certain of victory. Victory would have meant the evacuation of Basra, if not of Mesopotamia. So sure had the Turks been that they had struck a medal for the occasion, celebrating the triumph of the capture of Basra. Our men found sacks full of these cheap aluminium badges in the Turkish trenches, and they were sold afterwards in the bazaar at Basra by the thousand. But the Turks never wore them, for, at the most extreme and critical moment, across the plain there came a swirling column of dust, a flashing of wheels, and a thundering of hoofs. The sight was too much for the Turks. Another battery, or even a whole brigade of artillery, after those three exhausting days of fighting, was not worth waiting for. So they rose from their trenches

and began to flee, and the Arabs, changing their minds with incredible swiftness, fell on them in the rear and cut and slashed them about considerably. In the meanwhile the strange column galloped up. But there were no guns. In place of guns stood a strangely assorted collection of wagons, spring carts, tongas—anything on wheels—that a certain doctor had got together and brought up at full speed to take away the wounded. The Turkish Commander, Suleiman Askari, committed suicide.

A New Zealander came into hospital one day from Shaiba way. He was a wireless man, and being so, had found something in the desert that puzzled the science of his mind. He explained the matter. Out there it is a white, undulating expanse, burning hot, but with more air than in Basra. There are extraordinary effects of perspective. A man standing a short way off may assume gigantic proportions, or

look like a dwarf. A motor car near by would seem to lose its solidity and dissolve into a few filmy lines. The mirage of water is everywhere. An Arab might lie in the open and no one would see him. A post might look like a horseman at full gallop. It was a country of topsy-turveydom as regards the subjective estimate of the eyes. But what puzzled the wireless man was this. He thought he understood how eye-strain and difference of refractive power of the layers of heated air, or reflected light from the ground and such physical considerations could cause these illusions. But what he could not understand was how it came about that several men would experience exactly the same illusion. Why should a post simultaneously appear as an Arab on horseback or an Arab crawling stealthily on the ground to half a dozen men ? Mirage, like Rumour, is a curious thing. It may have some inner connection

with the set of a man's feelings. It has its pleasant side when it paints water and palms where there is no water nor any palms. It has its sinister side when it clothes the most innocent features of the landscape in images of dread. Who knows how it touched up that flying column of ambulance wagons in the eyes of the Turks? There are certain areas that are constantly the site of mirage. Our gunners found this a continual difficulty at the front, for the hostile Arabs, knowing the mirage areas, would get into them and make ranging impossible. A transport column on the move through mirage is a curious sight. You see, across the plain, a long line of black dots, which are the wagons on the move. But apparently they are passing through the centre of a narrow lake, that runs in the same direction as their line of advance. The reflection in the lake is perfect in every detail and that is suspicious, for a train of

wagons and horses crossing a shallow lake would stir up the water and disturb reflection. But there is another thing that helps you to recognise mirage. At the tail of the column rises a cloud of dust and here and there along the line you can make out a little wreath of dust rising apparently from the surface of the mirroring water.

The fall of Kut did not ease the pressure at the hospitals. The sick rate was increasing steadily. The Shimal, the north-west wind that comes just in time to make it possible for you to believe in Providence, was not due until the middle of June. Down by the river-side, where the official meteorological station stood, the day temperature was far over 100 degrees, and up in the airless creeks, in the palm groves, it was much higher. Clinical thermometers cracked if they were left lying about on tables. Our staff was getting seriously depleted. No

Tommy had to work so hard as those hospital orderlies, and it is not surprising that our casualties in sick men were very heavy. Clerks in the office became ward masters at a moment's notice. But in spite of all this the spirit of the place remained unshaken. However great the heat, it did not destroy that sense of humour which is the glory of the British Army. Rather be beaten and retain that sense than be victorious and lose it. And if you come to think of it, no man who retains his sense of humour is ever really beaten.

VI

THE DAY'S WORK

THE great distances that separate the main stations in Mesopotamia, and the long sea voyage between Basra and Bombay, threw a considerable strain on that part of the army that sits in offices and deals with army forms. At Poona the supreme headquarters of the campaign resided amid the clear breezes of the Indian hills. The consequence was that in cases where two or three copies of a form would have sufficed on the Western front, there it was necessary to multiply them indefinitely, so as to satisfy all the various authorities down the line. For example, in sending sick to India,

a nominal roll is compiled with name, number, rank, regiment, nature of disease and so on. This, in triplicate, is an ordinary procedure anywhere. But in Basra it was necessary, for some reason, to make out over twenty copies, and this is a long business on a typewriter that will only do a small number at a time, and is wanted for other things. It also caused a great delay before indents could materialise. You wished, say, to order a truss for a patient. Out there, owing to the heat, articles of this nature perished quickly. You reported the measurements to the quartermaster. He made a copy of the indent in triplicate, as well as an office copy. The indents went to the Assistant Director of Medical Services for approval. They were then sent back to the quartermaster. He then sent them to the Base Medical Depot, who acknowledged their receipt and said they would be

sent to India as soon as possible. In India they passed through other complicated machinery and the weeks went by. A truss, I suppose, is worth a few shillings.

There were three other factors that added to the difficulties, apart from distance. One was the bar at the mouth of the river, which made it impossible for deeply laden vessels coming up the Persian Gulf and drawing many feet of water to pass without unloading in part into another vessel. The other was that strip of river between Kurna and Amara known as the Narrows, where river boats with supplies stuck constantly, especially when the floods fell and the water was low. One boat sticking here would hold up all traffic.

The third factor was the effect of the excessive heat. This effect, rather subtle in itself, might be called the psychological factor of the situation, for there is not the

slightest doubt that it produced a kind of cussedness in everyone, from the highest to the lowest, and sapped energy and made changes unwelcome. For excessive and prolonged heat —and the hot season lasted seven or eight months—rouses a defensive mechanism of inertia whose aim is to preserve life. You saw that in the earliest cases of incipient heat-stroke. A man felt suddenly all the power go out of his legs. He wanted to lie down, and this was the best thing he could do.

Mental exertion became almost impossible. Reading was not easy, writing was a burden, and thinking a matter of extreme difficulty. Your interest lay in watching the simplest thing. A Japanese fly-trap with its slowly-turning, sticky surfaces was fascinating. There was a spice of oriental cruelty in the way it slowly entrapped the fly, and it was exactly that which made the appeal. You soon under-

stood how it comes about that the Eastern takes all the natural facts of life for granted, without bothering about fine shades, and acts on them unquestioningly. What is called altruism in the West seems artificial. It is not cynicism exactly that the place breeds, and I never met anyone who was sentimental in Mesopotamia, but it is a kind of descent that occurs to a level of values that are coloured black and white, quite plain. A man who expected to throw a spell over the country and act as a stimulant on everyone would truly need to possess a prodigious character. "In the tropics there is going on continually and unconsciously a tax on the nervous system which is absent in temperate climates. The nervous system, especially those parts which regulate the temperature of the body, is always on the strain, and the result is that in time it suffers from more or less exhaustion." The

common effect of this is a "deficient mental energy generally commencing with unnatural drowsiness or loss of appetite and a yearning for stimulants which culminates in that lowering of nerve potential which we know so well as neurasthenia." Thus write the professors of medicine in India on the effects of prolonged heat. I would add to it a large mental element, partly induced by the lack of any kind of amusement, by the want of interest, and by the peculiar effect of a landscape that is entirely flat and uniform. An artificial mountain scenery, painted on canvas, such as one used to see at Earl's Court, would have been a blessed relief. I think a London fog would have been delightful. Towards the end of September, a few small, fleecy clouds appeared one day in the sky and everyone ran out and stared solemnly at them as if they were angels. But there is one phrase that sums up

the prolonged effects of heat better than any scientific rigmarole. It takes the silk out of a man.

In Basra there was published daily a small, excellent newspaper which gave the latest Reuters and printed selections from papers that came by the mail. It was sorely missed when we went up river. I believe it was edited by a lady. There was a club in Ashar where it was possible to sit under electric fans. In old Basra there was an Arab theatre, containing a few dancing girls and a cinematograph. But the arrival of the mails was the great feature of life out there. They came roughly once a week, and it is difficult to describe with what emotions they were received. The whole district became revivified for a space under their influence.

Through the month of June the sickness increased and work went on steadily increas-

ing. We had 400 beds in the wards at that time, and it was necessary to find accommodation for an average of 700 patients. Anyone who was likely to be sick for any length of time was sent to India whenever the opportunity arose. Down at the British Hospital on the river front they were sending cases off that were likely to be more than three days ill. It was an oriental polyglot scene down there on the hospital quay in the comparative cool of evening, when the big white hospital ship lay off the bank and crowds of ticketed patients sat under the shelters waiting their turn to embark. Now and then a pale nurse, dressed in white, with white helmet and red-lined parasol would walk through the throng. Arab *belumchis*, Jews, Persians, Armenians, Sikhs, Gurkhas, Pathans, and Ghats crowded the bank, voluble and picturesque. Dhobies thrashed clothes at the river edge. Bhisties

drew water in kerosene tins. Convalescent Tommies in blue dungaree, fished stolidly—wishing they were bound for India. The roofs of the square white buildings were filled with nurses taking tea. Launches whirled up and discharged Staff officers. All down the centre of the stream lay big vessels. Already the place had a cosmopolitan spirit—a new-born genius—and one could see it dimly in the future, when the Baghdad railway runs through it to Kuweit, a white city, garish with painted promenades and electric lights, with as many languages sounding in the street as in Port Said.

The dates were now hanging in big masses of oval, greeny-yellow fruit, some in clusters of two hundredweight and more, and the palm leaves were turning brown at their points. The scarlet of the pomegranate trees had vanished from the date groves and the floods

were beginning to fall. It had been necessary to surround the hospital clearing with a mud wall, or bund, about four feet in height, in order to keep out the water, for at times there is as much as a six foot rise when the tide comes up the Shatt-el-Arab.

At any simple job of this kind the Arabs are quite good. They can plaster mud on a roof, or make a bund, or run up a mud and reed hut, or raise the level of the flooring of a ward, and they take their time over it. But anything that savours of machinery is usually beyond them. It was a common saying amongst the Arabs that sickness stopped as soon as the dates were gathered in. That proved to be untrue. It was a long while until the dates were ripe, and after they were gathered sickness still continued. The amount of heat those dates required before they turned yellow and soft, and their skins began

On the Shatt-el-Arab near Basra.

to crinkle faintly, was extraordinary. For weeks and weeks they remained hard and green, though exposed to the fiercest heat of the sun. Pomegranates, in the same way, hung for months before their skins turned to that beautiful deep mahogany hue of the ripe fruit.

On a particular day at the end of June one might have fancied a crisis had been reached. Curiously enough, by the irony of coincidence, the Reuter of that day contained the news that it had been stated in Parliament that, in the interests of the public, no statement would be made about the state of affairs in Mesopotamia.

That night it was rumoured that Verdun had fallen. . . .

The gift of a large fleet of motor ambulances presented by the cinema people at home was a great boon, for urgent cases could be trans-

ported to hospital rapidly, instead of jolting over the plain in bullock tongas. Unfortunately, the axles of these cars were not quite equal to the rough work, and in a short time they were sent away to other spheres where roads were better. The ground in our neighbourhood was so undermined by floods that on one occasion one of these cars, standing empty, suddenly broke through the upper crust up to its axles. A great deal of perspiration flowed before it was extricated.

In the meanwhile the creek was full of *mahallas* loading up equipment, for we had received orders to go higher up-river.

VII

THE NARROWS

We left Basra when the Arabs, and the Indian troops, were celebrating the Mohammedan feast of Ramadhan. During the feast, which lasts a month, night is turned into day. No food is allowed, in theory, from sunrise to sunset. Drums beat, dogs howl, cocks crow and the revellers shout and wail and clap their hands in long, rhythmic, staccato periods, and explosions of powder occur under the crescent moon.

A small, double-decked, squat river boat which had been captured from the Turks took us on board. It burned oil fuel. A single

canvas awning with many gaps in it covered the upper deck. The lower deck was nearly taken up by engine and boiler, save for a small saloon aft, and water tanks and a galley forward. Our strength was about 100 men with twenty Indians belonging to the hospital, and there were a few odd details travelling as well and the crowding was considerable. On each side of the steamer were big barges. On the port side was a barge of mules. On the starboard side a barge of fodder, and various bales and cases, surmounted by a crowd of coolies. The smell from either side was like a Zoo. We set off in high spirits, for we had heard that Amara, whither we were bound, was a Paradise compared to Basra. The heat was excessive. Behind the funnel on deck, where our quarters lay, it was 125 degrees, and the awning did not do much towards keeping out the burden of the

sun. The country through which we passed was green-tinged with sparse palms, and absolutely flat. In the river were long strings of *mahallas*, being towed by teams of Arabs. These craft may take sixteen days to reach Amara. In the heat of the day the towing team gets into the river and moves slowly along up to their waists in water. Owing to a long stop at Margil, which lies two miles above Basra, and is the site of the Supply people, we did not make much progress the first day. At sunset it is necessary to tie up, or anchor, in the stream. The night was not so bad save for mosquitoes, and after a sousing of river water, drawn forward of the mule barge, and a cup of tea at dawn, we felt cheerful. We started at four-thirty and passed Kurna.

Kurna is the Garden of Eden. It lies at the junction of the Euphrates and Tigris,

and is a small hamlet of white houses. Here there is a wide area of date palms and a great brown, tranquil stretch of river. A white doorway in a yellow wall, shaped like a pear, marks the supposed position of Paradise. The doorway bears a tablet with an Arabic inscription. Behind the doorway, just visible over the wall, a tree grows. This may or may not be the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, because a dwarfed sinister tree lower down, to which barges tie up, is given the name. But I prefer the one in its walled garden, a faded, simple, harmless-looking tree. And the result of eating its fruit can be moralised on here, for on one side of it is the bazaar square, where whisky and beer and tobacco are sold, and on the other side is the telegraph office with the news of the war blazoned on the iron-studded door and an armed sentry before it.

Beyond Kurna the Tigris takes some immense curves so that at times you seem to see the sails of *mahallas* all round the horizon. We lay on deck, staring idly at the unvarying landscape which quivered under the sun. Occasionally Arab villages were passed, constructed out of the matting made from reeds, which is a local industry. The reeds grow in big patches all the way up the river banks. On the second night we tied up below Ezra's tomb. There was local Arab trouble in this part at the time and we passed an outpost of native troops; also a mud hut, standing solitary in a swamp in the plain and bearing the words "Leicester Lounge" in black lettering. It seemed deserted.

At night there was a lot of lamp-signalling all round the horizon in naval code. One caught M.M.O. repeatedly and then a lot of figures. Some fires lit up the sky line to the

north. On that night the heat was beyond description. A plague of sand-flies and mosquitoes descended on the ship. No one slept a wink. The mules screamed and kicked. There was not a breath of air. A heavy smell pervaded the ship, and at times it seemed that one's mind wandered a little. Before dawn a great cry came out of the steamy darkness from some worshipping Arab and was repeated twice. After a long silence a cock crew far across the plain and was answered a hundred times. Then came a misty blue light and a sudden glare of yellow. The day had begun and the engines started.

A monitor passed, bristling with guns and painted a vivid green. Ezra's tomb is a mosque standing stark on the brown plain beside the river in a clump of palms. It is kept in beautiful preservation, for it is visited by pilgrim Jews. Against the lovely blue of the dome,

with its circle of gold, a tall palm leans, bending sharply inward as if to kiss the Prophet's last resting-place in some sudden mood of devotion. Some way above it lies a big village, and as we passed crowds of Arabs lined the bank. Naked boys dived into the river after money. The women, dashing types with nose rings, clad in robes of wonderful vermilion and purple colours, ran along the banks with fowls and eggs for sale. Herds of black buffalo, submerged up to the nose, basked in the water.

At one lonely place we passed a small shelter, a roof of yellow matting supported by a few posts, containing six rather pale-hued women with richly coloured robes and bangles seated in a semi-circle on the ground. Outside stood the lord of the manor, very swarthy, in dazzling white, with a rifle slung over his shoulder, scowling ferociously as he

surveyed the plains. He was a kind of policeman, I believe, in our pay. At any rate he seemed to be, like policemen in general, a strong lover of domestic life. Six wives may have contributed a little towards overcoming the extreme monotony of life in the place.

Above Ezra's tomb begin the Narrows. The Tigris becomes very narrow, pouring its filthy yellow water at a great speed between the sharply cut banks. The turns are so sharp, being at times much more acute than a right angle, that the only way to get round is to charge the bank, bump off with a great churning of paddles and creaking of lashings and clanging of the telegraph from the bridge, and work the steamer's nose into the centre of the stream again. The banks, at these spots, are perfectly smooth and polished owing to the constant impacts. By themselves the river steamers could get round more skil-

fully, but with their clumsy barges on each side it was impossible. The S-boats—the stern wheelers—of which there are only a few, do not carry barges, and therefore their handiness and speed are much greater. They can run from Basra to Sheik Saad, close to the front, within three days, and can travel by night if necessary.

At three in the afternoon as we bumped and scraped and panted up the tortuous river, we came on the familiar sight of a convoy stuck, broadside on, across the river in front of us. A little smoke came from her funnel. The sun beat savagely down on her apparently deserted decks. Behind her there was nothing but shimmering plain and the occasional flash of water. Our engine-room telegraph rang. The engines stopped and we slewed into the bank and dropped anchor. Then the skipper and his navigating lieu-

tenants withdrew to their cabins and the engine-room staff, composed of an Englishman who had run boats up to Baghdad for ten years, and a few Christian Baghdadies—powerful dark men, who seemed to speak a kind of French—disposed themselves for rest on the lower deck, and a great peace descended on the scene. Away over the horizon, north and south, some columns of smoke were visible coming from other convoys that were converging on the Narrows. It was necessary to wait for the tide, as well as for a tug. There was nothing to do but to watch the plain. At first sight it appeared lifeless, an expanse of golden browns, reds and yellows, with a sharp purple rim on the skyline. But closer observation showed long lines of cattle, mere dots in the distance, moving slowly in search of pasture. In the shadow of a hummock an Arab boy and girl

sat together motionless. A mile along the level two Arabs were rhythmically swinging water up from a cutting by means of a shallow vessel with ropes attached to the side. The flash of it caught the eye, and there was a patch of vivid emerald where the water fell. To the north it was possible to make out the arms of a semaphore lying idle. There was no sound in the place. The river itself flowed silently. Only the occasional deep drone of a hornet or the note of a mosquito came to the ear. The sun seemed to be drawing the land together, sucking up all the sap it contained.

As we sat and gazed at these bending and twisting Narrows the idea arose that it might be possible, by a little cutting, to do away with the worst bits and open up a straight channel. For there were two main places of obstruction, called the Devil's Elbow and

Pear Drop Reach. But it is necessary to say this with caution, for tampering with great rivers like the Tigris may cause unthought-of trouble. It upsets the natural balance of the waters.

Gradually the other convoys drew near and dropped anchor above and below the obstructing vessel. Some native troops in one of them got out on the bank and began to bathe, or wandered about looking for fuel to cook their evening meal, and towards evening a string of Arab women and children, from some remote village, came along with eggs and melons and pumpkins. In the meanwhile a kind of activity prevailed in the region of the obstruction. A tug boat appeared and ropes were stretched out to posts on the land and the water was being churned to foam by the paddles. It was said that General Y was on a convoy ahead,

and General X, who was going up to replace him, was in a convoy behind us. It was possible to count seven convoys in all, and smoke columns were still rising in the south. It was not until darkness fell that the ship was pulled off, and it was too late to move on that night. So we ate our bully beef and settled down for the night. Once more our sensations were indescribable. The sand-flies were like a million little red-hot wires. There was not a breath of air and the mules screamed and fought and gasped alongside. One hundred and fifty people packed on a small deck, round a funnel that is still burning hot, make a poor job of sleeping in such a climate.

It was the devout prayer of everyone that we might reach our destination next day and get off the ship and away from those mules. That was not to be. We reached

Amara in the darkness of the evening, and anchored near the Rawal Pindi Hospital. Owing to a case of cholera that had developed that day on the starboard barge, we were put in quarantine, so it was necessary to unpack one's kit again and shake down for the night on deck. One of the most refractory mules kicked itself loose of its moorings and fell into the stream in the darkness. Several men risked their lives in rescuing it. One would have thought, seeing that it had been the noisiest and most vicious brute on the barge, that drowning was scarcely good enough for it. And what is a wife to think of her husband when she is told that he was drowned while gallantly attempting to rescue from the swift current of the Tigris a mule that could swim far better than he could? As no one was drowned, perhaps it is unnecessary to ask the question.

Arab Belum on Tigris.

VIII

AMARA

We reached Amara about the middle of July. At that time there was practically nothing happening at the front, but the sickness was great. Amara, by reason of its openness, was a little fresher than Basra, but the temperature was high. It was 125 degrees in the shade on the day following our arrival.

The white low houses line along the river front on the left bank in a more orderly fashion than at Ashar. A bridge of boats connects the two banks. This bridge, which existed before the war, swings open from the centre and lets traffic through. On the right

bank a few houses were scattered amongst thick groves of palms. There is somehow a more oriental spirit at Amara than at Basra. The *belums* are more fantastically curved, the mystery of the town more apparent, and the narrow-domed bazaar, full of dim light and vivid colour, is permeated with the spirit of the Arabian Nights. There are some cunning craftsmen in the bazaar, particularly the silver- and gold-smiths, who make exquisite inlaid work. They do this after the manner of true artists, in that they work seemingly more by a process of thought and feeling rather than with the aid of tools. For they sit on the ground with a bowl of water, a small charcoal fire, a strip of metal, and a deeply preoccupied look, and after a time the article is finished. The overlaying of silver by antimony is their particular craft. Owing to the orders they

received, they soon began to charge prohibitive prices. At certain times it was possible to get egret feathers, and also astrachan—the skin of unborn lambs—in the bazaar. The old copper vessels that were sold in many of the shops were sometimes very beautiful.

The suspected cholera case proving doubtful, we were put out of quarantine next morning, and moved across the river to the site of the hospital which we were to take over. It lay round a bend in the river on the right bank above and well out of the town. To the north lay the river, to the south the desert. A large number of mud and reed huts, in long rows, stood on the plain, covering an area of about a quarter of a square mile. These were the wards. There was a sense of space that was refreshing after the cramped and littered area of the clearing at Basra,

with its surrounding marshes and palm groves. We officers were put in tents in a small palm and pomegranate thicket at the periphery of the hospital area. The nursing quarters were at the other end, nearer the town. These quarters were built of wood and low roofed, with a layer of mud on the top. The nurses were in many cases volunteers who had seen service in Mudros, and these had just got the Royal Red Cross Medal, equivalent to a D.S.O. Very pleased they were with it, and greatly they deserved it. Their quarters were divided by thin mud walls into narrow compartments, and they found the lack of sound-deadening properties trying. But that is a universal experience of this war—the continual overhearing of conversation, the necessity for being in a crowd, and the lack of moments of privacy. They slept out of doors, on the river front, in a wired

enclosure, patrolled by a sentry. The sentries were a peculiarity of the place which distinguished it from Basra. For in that region looters came in from the desert, some from the villages and some from camps of nomad Arabs. Their great ambition was firearms. The second ambition seemed to be clothing. There must exist somewhere a complete colony of khaki-clad Arabs, of all ranks up to Staff officers, probably in some district Persia-way, in the Pashtikhu hills. They were extremely daring. They would come in at night on horseback, leave their horses out on the plain and stroll in under the sentries' noses. For many months a spirit of compromise was shown in the matter, but eventually a stronger line was taken and the Sheiks of the surrounding country were put under the penalty of a heavy fine if looting continued. Occasionally men were

stabbed by these marauders, who carried long, curved knives, but the main object was looting and not killing.

It was a singular spot to find a large number of women, away up in the heart of that elemental country of fire and water and earth. But they remained untouched by any kind of pessimism, nor were they greatly interested in the campaign as a military affair. All their interest was in their work. They were a wonderful stimulus. Where a man unwittingly tended to let things slide they exhorted and energised. In details, they did not seem to show that gradual decadence that creeps imperceptibly over men when isolated and overworked. It is perhaps so subtle that it takes a woman to detect it. Women may be theoretically unscientific, but they are essential to the maintenance of the scientific spirit and practice. Naturally they suffered sickness,

but not nearly so much as one might have expected; for discipline plays a tremendous part in the avoidance of sickness. It is not so much a physical factor as a moral one. It seemed possible to induce a practice of going sick very easily, and in that climate it was only necessary to permit some inner act of surrender that escapes simple definition, but resembles the lowering of a dog's tail, and one became a sick man. It was not exactly malingering.

Beyond the western boundary of the hospital, behind the officers' tents, lay an oriental garden. An oil engine and pumps at the river's edge supplied the water to it through channels. The machine was worked by an Arab who, as far as one could tell, prayed to it. In the garden, full of moist heat and splashes of colour, lived a colony of jackals, those extraordinary spirits of hell,

whose wailing and hysteria are so amazing. I do not know how Darwin would have accounted for the particular note they strike. It is probably on a level with the roaring of the lion, in that it is designed to terrify. But the jackal does not terrify by such obvious methods as the lion. He plays on your eerie, ghostly, superstitious side. He brings up into the imagination the malignity and hopelessness of the damned. He seems to people the night with wailing horrors. To a man dying of thirst in the desert, the jackal must just give the final touch of despair that makes death and nothingness seem best. It must be strange to die, surrounded by jackals at their chthonian litanies.

Shortly after we reached Amara, the news came that Sir Victor Horsley had died. It was in a season of extreme heat, when death comes suddenly in many forms. Eighty

officers attended his funeral in columns of fours, the most junior in front. He had a coffin. Wood was precious in Amara. There were some other bodies sewn up in army blankets. A long, dusty march of a mile to the cemetery, a shallow earth grave, a brief ceremony, the same for all, and a weary tramp home in the sun—that was the final picture. There is one detail to add, and that is the lovely playing of the "Last Post" over the graves. In him we lost the finest surgeon in Mesopotamia.

For many days after this we moved about as it were in a vast furnace. The nights were broken by sand-flies. Personally, I found the only way of keeping them out was to wear socks on the feet and hands, and smear the face and neck with some kind of ointment, on which their feet slip, so that they cannot find a purchase when in the act of driving

their sucking apparatus into the skin. In the morning, what with the sweat and the grease, and the tropical exhaustion, one looked like few things on earth. Oil of citronella is only of temporary use; paraffin and creosote are of little good. Butter muslin nets are out of the question, as the heat is stifling under them. The burning of aromatic or pungent compounds is useless, and as for killing them, one might lie awake all night, scuffling and dabbing and slapping at the almost invisible forms without gaining the slightest benefit. In the day time they hide in cracks in the ground, under bits of matting or anywhere out of the sun. Sand-fly fever is a malady that begins like influenza. One aches all over. All the side of life that is enjoyment fades away. It is impossible to smoke, or eat, or drink, or read, or talk. In Malta, where it is indigenous, a convalescence

of three weeks is allowed. It was not possible to allow that in Amara. The fever lasts two or three days, coming down in two main stages. The use of opium is recommended. As regards the use of opium in Mesopotamia, it was possible to gain the idea from actual experience that it was a most valuable drug during the hot season. If limited to three drugs and no more, for work in that country, I should prefer opium, Epsom salts and quinine. The quinine that we obtained through official channels was in the form of pink tablets and came from the cinchona plantations at Darjeeling that are run by the Indian Government. These tablets are coloured pink to prevent fraudulent selling, for they are handed out to natives in malarial districts in large quantities, free of charge, and natives are not great believers in medicine. The tablets are extremely hard and

insoluble. Prolonged exposure to the action of dilute mineral acids produces no effect on them. We had, for the men, quinine parades, when five grains were swallowed as a prophylactic against malaria every day. They were amusing affairs to watch—serried ranks with water-bottles, standing to attention while the sergeant dispenser walked with proper dignity down the line handing a pink tablet to each man, who gulped it spasmodically, took a draught of water and returned to attention. It reminded one of a religious ceremony, of some strange communion service. In giving the quinine in large doses it was essential to dissolve it, if any effect was aimed at. Even then it rarely produced symptoms of quinine poisoning. The home preparations were more satisfactory to use. As regards opium, it was useful, apart from sand-fly fever, in those frayed, sleepless states

of mind that prolonged heat induces. The English idea that a dose of morphia or laudanum at once induces the opium habit, though very safe, is not altogether sound. Other hypnotics were usually not strong enough to give long sleep; but here, to produce an effect with hypnotics, it seemed necessary to double the dose. This may have had something to do with some deterioration in drugs caused by the big demands of the war. But I do not think it was the only explanation. Of course, for those who dreaded the use of opium, and preferred chloral or bromide, it was only necessary to glance into the tents where the Chinese carpenters slept at night. There one saw rows of comatose figures and if you cared to lift the lips from the gums of those sleepers, you would usually see a little sticky mass of opium wedged in between the teeth. That was one way of

solving the problem of sand-flies and heat at night and no doubt an admirable illustration of the dangers of the drug. But it is possible to find illustrations for everything.

At Amara, paratyphoid A was commonest in the troops coming down from the Front. It was not a very grave disorder, but sometimes, particularly when complicated by other factors, it was fatal. It must be remembered that many patients reached us as emaciated skeletons, in the last stage of exhaustion. Special wards were set aside for typhoid cases. Dysentery was also increasing, and wards were reserved for these cases. It was mainly what is called bacillary dysentery, for which Epsom salts is one of the best remedies. All typhoid cases, as soon as convalescent, were sent to India. That was because they often carry the germs in the intestinal tract a long time after recovery

and therefore may become a source of infection. They spent on an average three months in India before returning for service. There was no place in Mesopotamia where convalescent patients could be sent with a reasonable prospect of gaining full health. About twenty miles beyond Aligarbi lie the Pashtikhu hills and there in those high altitudes a big military sanatorium might have been established. This would have saved endless transport difficulties, if a light railway had been constructed. But no doubt the military situation rendered the carrying out of such an idea impracticable. Heat-stroke in Amara was common enough, but it did not seem so fatal as at Basra. This, perhaps, was due to the air, which was drier and fresher. The supply of ice was also more adequate.

We had some unlucky spells. It is a curious thing that luck seems to enter into the matter

of death rates. I mean that sometimes for two or three days at a time cases seemed to go wrong and die, on the slightest provocation. At other times, when the luck changed, the most hopeless cases would clear up. It was the same way in the operating theatre. It is the same way with everything, whether it be card playing, or business, or war, or love, or thinking, or sport. There are phases in which something seems to overshadow the scene. The direction of the current changes. For a time everything seems to go wrong. The machinery behind life, that is always helping you on, stops and reverses. And there is another aspect of the same thing which doctors sometimes see in a remarkable way. It is the occurrence of similar kinds of cases at the same time. For part of it there is the scientific explanation of infection by germs.

Ezra's Tomb.

The Shimal was now blowing from the north-west, bringing the dust in from the desert. At times it produced a strange effect. The atmosphere became dun-coloured, thickened at places into opaque and rushing veils. Under the pressure of the strong, hot wind the big *mahallas*, with their white sails in tense curves, careered down the river with only a streak of white foam under the prow to show they were not suspended in the air. The further bank, pale and unsubstantial, was outlined fitfully in the hurrying gloom. A kind of lividity spread over the picture, bleaching it of all colour. Everything in the wards became silted over with fine powder, and the big yellow and black hornets and the long-legged wasps that seem to have two or three pendant abdomens and are the hue of Burgundy marigolds, came hurtling through the unglazed windows to crawl, half-stunned,

about the mud floors. How the ward Sisters anathematised these days! The storms provoked a feeling not unlike east winds at home. They brought out small aches and pains and one got irritable. A thunderstorm would have cleared away the effect, but the sky remained cloudless and brazen.

IX

ARABIAN COMEDY

NOTHING was happening at the front. Occasionally there was spasmodic shelling and bomb dropping, but the heat prevented any general activity. Headquarters was under howitzer fire at times. One shell landed in the mess waiter's tent and damaged nine men.

There was a tale told at the time concerning a powerful Sheik near the front who was neutral. His son becoming ill, he sent to the Turks, and also to us, for a doctor. The Turks, or rather the Germans, sent a German doctor, and a German lady as well, the latter as a bribe. We sent a medical officer, unat-

tended. The Sheik kept them all. So far as I know he may still be keeping them, and remaining strictly neutral. It must be remembered that the Arabs—as well as many Indians—have been led to believe that not only the Kaiser is a Mohammedan, but the German people in general.

Towards the end of July there were day temperatures of 124 degrees in the shade, and the wind, when it blew, seemed as if it had passed over a burning city. It was impossible to do anything save what was absolutely necessary. The sickness amongst the medical staff became rather serious, and at times we had to look after far more cases than we could treat adequately. But in these moments of temporary dislocation, the presence of nurses made all the difference and that state of confusion that had existed in Basra never occurred.

The day's programme was unvarying. After a somewhat exhausting night we rose at seven. The best hours of sleep were usually after sunrise, for then the sand-flies vanished. After breakfast of tea, eggs and bread, the ward work started. This lasted until about midday. Then came lunch, accompanied by many flies, and afterwards a long siesta, during which one wore the minimum of clothing. At four or five one dressed again, after a bath, and took a look at the wards to see any bad cases. Then the evening began, in which life became more possible. Dinner was usually a cheerful meal. After dinner what to do was a great problem. One just did nothing. During all this time everyone became thin. Any sickness, even a slight attack of diarrhœa, brought down weight rapidly. There was the case of a certain sergeant, whose immense girth was

much revered by the Arabs. One can understand, perhaps, how it comes about that fatness is admired in the East. It is so rare. It is much easier to be thin. The sergeant went into hospital for a few days. When he came out he had lost his glory even as Samson was shorn of his strength in a night. His clothes hung about him in huge folds. What had taken him years to produce was lost in six days, and with it went the respect of the Arabs. There is practically no fat in the country. There was no dripping for puddings. The cattle were all lean.

It is necessary to say a word about the Indian *personnel* attached to the hospital. These were the water carriers, washers and sweepers. They had been immensely pleased at the idea of leaving Basra. But at Amara, where they found things little better, there was some lamentation. In temperament they

were mere children requiring a father. But of one venerable and aged man I would like to record a few things. He was a gaunt, tall, grey-bearded fellow as thin as a stick-insect, and he performed the most menial of all services, being a sweeper by caste. But what he did was done with passionate devotion. He had seen service in France and spoke a few curious French words. Troops on active service in France certainly are taught some strange phrases. All day he toiled with his kerosine tins and brushes and when he had nothing to do he invented something. He would, for instance, dust the palm trees outside the mess, pausing always to salute even the shadow of an officer on the horizon in a stiff cramped fashion, and then applying himself with silent zeal to his remarkable task. He came one day in some grief and said that he had heard

that his daughter in his village in India was to have married a certain man. He, the father, had contributed 100 rupees towards the cost of the ceremony. The suitor had taken the money and then announced his intention of marrying someone else. News of the fraud had reached the venerable old man in Mesopotamia and caused him to tremble with wrath. Could the great Sahib, who was his father and mother, write to the Viceroy of India and demand justice? To which the great Sahib in question, after considering the matter gravely, replied, "Write to the pig who is the son of a pig and say to him that unless he marries thy daughter before two moons have passed then will the Viceroy himself be informed by a telegram which I myself will send, and justice shall be served out in this evil matter." The joy of the old man was great and he hastened

away to get the letter written. Next day he was clattering his tins and brushes with a devotion to duty that was as worthy of a medal as many things in the war. I was told the marriage was now certain to come off. Still, it seems a bad beginning to matrimony, and if a man is a pig, and the son of a pig, his children will presumably also be pigs.

There was an Arab theatre at Amara, and in September they produced a play, in Arabic. It was based on a topical incident. No Arab was allowed to go into camps, hospitals and so on, without a pass, and this was amazing to the Oriental mind. The scene was a bare stage, lit by flares, and an audience of bearded Arabs, Arab police and a few British officers in the front row. On the stage sat a fat woman mournfully shaking a tambourine, and between whiles going to sleep. Up the middle

centre lay a fat man, groaning. It was evident that he was playing a sick part. Beside him lamented his wife, a dancing girl, squat-nosed and heavy hipped. The low comedian entered. It is not in the interests of the public to describe him too closely. Eventually he assumed the part of physician. His treatment of the patient followed the plan of exorcising a devil. He hit and kicked him, spat on him and jumped on him. There was no improvement and the man died. The problem was now how to bury him. The low comedian said he would attend to that and heaved the fat man on his shoulders and went off to the cemetery. After an interminable pause he reappeared still carrying the corpse. He dumped it on the ground and made a gesture of despair. "It is no good," he said. "I cannot bury him. I haven't got a pass!" This brought the house down and the fat

woman woke up and applied herself vigorously to the tambourine. At the theatre at Basra, when European films were shown, the Arabs always laughed very much at the amount of kissing that white folk indulged in. It seemed to strike them as an extraordinary way of passing the time.

Arab women are not beautiful. Their faces are aquiline, their cheek bones high, and their lips coarse. Their figures are lithe and they walk well, with a sinuous swagger. But there is a sharp, harsh tone about them and one could imagine them very accomplished in bitter speeches. Their eyes are their best feature, but they contain an expression that is hard, restless and challenging. They mess themselves about with henna. Some wear nose rings and all wear bangles that clash as they walk. They were interested in the nurses and seemed for some obscure reason

mildly amused. As labourers they were employed in large numbers carrying baskets of earth on their heads, or mixing mud and straw for plastering purposes. At a comparatively early age they lose whatever looks they possess and become most extraordinarily malevolent hags. The Arab men, as they age, usually look rather fine and dignified. The young Arab is not attractive. He looks heavy, sullen and sensual, and his expression is full of greed and cunning.

X

THE BATTLE OF THE BUND

It was when the moon began to wane that the Arab marauders became troublesome. Shots whizzed about the place at night, and one continually heard the high pitched, nervous challenge of native sentries: "'Alt, who goes da?" It was unwise to move about after dark without a lantern. In peace time Amara is not free from this kind of trouble and an interpreter remarked that just as much shooting used to go on then. It was as well not to be absent-minded. One of the Sisters on her way back from a ward at night was challenged, and thought it was some delirious patient. She approached

him resolutely and the click of a rifle brought her to her senses. Towards the end of August the amount of looting became serious. On the other side of the river was a big camp, where troops were sent to refit and rest. Here the thieves played many cunning tricks and there was some killing. They were adroit in stampeding horses and in the confusion that followed making off with several. The sentries were not allowed to load their rifles, as promiscuous firing was a source of danger to the occupants of the tents, which were crowded together on the plain. At times the looters slipped down the river in boats, and it became necessary to stop all night traffic. Any craft seen during the night was fired at from the bank.

We had our own particular problem. The hospital lay exposed to the plain. A bund, or mud wall, marked the outer boundary.

The native sentries who were allotted to guard the place were insufficient in number, as the area was considerable and thefts were constant. The doctors and orderlies volunteered to do sentry duty, and one Arab was shot and one wounded. This did not stop the stealing. Kit of every kind disappeared. At times a man woke up to find an Arab calmly removing his mosquito net, while another stood over him with a knife. It was a good policy to remain motionless for a short time. It was better than remaining motionless for ever. During the day time a large number of Arab men and women were employed in the hospital area. There were about fifty or so who sat all day under a matting shelter making mortar by some mysterious process of hammering, singing their eternal nursery rhymes that sound like "Ina Dina Dinah Do" over and over again. All

these Arabs were turned out of the compound before nightfall by the local Arab police —picturesque fellows, who wore khaki uniforms and Arab head cloths—but it is probable that they had something to do with the thefts. They were certainly guilty of other thefts and on one occasion the Indians, who had suffered severely as their tents lay nearest to the plain, very nearly murdered an Arab whom they found with some crusts of bread and some cooking utensils tied up in his clothing.

It seems to be a common belief among some people that the R.A.M.C. orderly is a man with nothing to do. It was an erroneous idea to hold in Mesopotamia, and when we were informed that we could arrange our own guards, there was some resentment. However, there was some chance of an interesting time, so parties were organised to

Walled Village on Banks of Tigris.

watch along the bund. On one occasion a show was arranged which might be termed the Grand Battle of the Bund. It was a battle without casualties. A crowded mess began the evening. Some naval men from a monitor lying alongside were present, very keen on doing some strafing, as everyone was, where Arabs were concerned. They related their own manner of dealing with such things higher up the river—"Turned a machine-gun on their cattle and annihilated the lot. That got the wind up them all right!" At nine-thirty our party, composed of twenty officers, all the mess waiters, and various other people—mostly victims of robbery—who silently attached themselves, and also some crack shots from the A.B.'s of the monitor, turned out somewhat noisily, all armed to the teeth with rifles, shot guns, blue flares, revolvers and clubs and dispersed into the

surrounding gloom. The bund was about four hundred yards long, and we lay at intervals of five yards or so, leaving a big gap at one end. But strategy went by the board. The great idea was to strafe Arabs. There was a murdered officer to avenge and some Tommies. The officer, by the way, was killed on the other side of the water. To revenge him, his brother officers turned out next night and lined the periphery of the camp towards the plain. It is said that Arabs, knowing of this, landed by boat behind them, crept into their deserted lines, looted everything and departed. The tale may or may not be true.

That bund was remarkably uncomfortable. One lay against its sloping side, scrambling to get a foothold and peering over the edge into the dim regions beyond. It was a moonless night, but clear and brilliant with stars.

The hours went slowly by. At last the Higher Command became weary and ordered a flare to be fired, and everyone to shoot at anything he saw on the plain. The flare was a prearranged signal for the monitor to turn on the searchlight. The flare went off and burst high above us. In a moment all was dark again. We waited for the searchlight to shine on the scene from over the fringe of riverside palms. At last it came, ghostly, fitful and strange, a sudden radiance in the dark plain, reaching far out of the shadows on the horizon.

There was a pause. Nothing resembling an Arab was to be seen. Firing began in a desultory way, as a flat celebration of people determined to do something. Then everyone went home leaving, no doubt, a dozen Arabs chuckling in some nullah lower down.

The looting continued. It culminated in

our area in some big thefts from the officers' tents. We had arranged patrols among ourselves. It is eerie work. In the groves the shadows are thick and black. You crook your finger round the trigger and wonder . . . . On the occasion of the Arab raid on our quarters we had for the moment abandoned the patrols, partly because it was at a time when, owing to sickness, there were few officers fit for it, and partly because the moon was bright. One woke up in the dawn light to find one's tent ransacked, and every bit of clothing gone. Footprints in the dust at the head of the bed gave an unpleasant sensation. It would have been little good waking in the middle of the affair, although one slept with a revolver under the sheet, when a watching Arab stood over one, knife in hand. After this some strong action was taken and the Sheiks, as I have mentioned,

were fined. There was also a little affair of stern punishing round Nasireyah that had a wholesome effect which spread as far as Amara. It is the only way to deal with the Arabs of this generation.

Apart from looting, the great danger that continually threatened us was fire. All the buildings were constructed of extremely inflammable material. There was no fire apparatus, save buckets. The canvas of the tents became so dry in the sun that a spark caused a conflagration. On one occasion an officer's tent caught fire at night. A burst of flames enveloped the canvas in a moment and the occupants, who were asleep, barely escaped. It was impossible to remove the articles inside the tent. Fortunately, the tent was in an isolated part, and only the surrounding palm trees suffered. But if a fire had really started in the main portion of the hospital, the whole

place would have been gutted in a twinkling. On one night a great glare arose from the river and it seemed as if Amara was in flames. A series of tremendous explosions followed. It was an ammunition barge somewhere in the stream that had suddenly blazed up. It was towed away to a safer place, but if the sparks that showered through the air had set fire to any house along the Tigris front, the entire town might have been in ruins by the morning.

During August scurvy was threatening the men at the front. Many Indians went down with it. It is an unpleasant disorder. The gums looked as if they were blown out like little pneumatic tyres. They were reddish-purple, ulcerated, and the stench was oppressive. Hard, woodeny swellings appeared on the legs, and the victim became very decrepit. One of the main preoccupations

THE TIGRIS NEAR KURNA.

in the wards was the differential diagnosis between atypical malaria and typhoid fever, for the malaria that one reads of in text-books did not exist save exceptionally. A man had an irregular temperature for days and it was often extremely difficult to give a name to the cause. Fortunately one had the assistance of a pathological laboratory, where blood could be examined and treated. In general, the typhoid cases were consistently heavy and depressed, while the malaria cases had spells of cheerfulness.

Life in the wards was not so bad for the patients. There was a certain amount of literature—it was never abundant—and there was a gramophone. There was also the occupation of killing flies with a fly-swotter, playing card games and dominoes, grousing, yarning, sleeping and eating. In the cool of the evening, the convalescents would line

the river bank and watch the convoys. There was bathing in the river. At times there were rumours of sharks, for sharks go up river as high as Baghdad. It is not possible to go far out in the stream unless one is a very powerful swimmer. The current is very swift. Tortoises used to line the margin of the river in the evening, with their heads sticking out above water, while crowds of angry birds accused them from the wet mud of the shore. Wild duck, partridge, snipe, sand-grouse and doves were fairly numerous, and in the evenings it was possible to get a good bag. It was worth shooting jackals, for their skins were in very good condition. The hospital had a football ground and later on, towards the end of the hot season, a tennis court was made with the aid of a mixture of mud and straw. A cheery innovation was started shortly after the

middle of the year. Concert parties, organised in India from the talent of the Army, came out and gave entertainments in the evening, and very good some of them were.

An effort was made to further the interests of medical science, and the Amara clinical society was started at which doctors met weekly and discussed cases and diagnoses, and papers were read. There is, I think, no better proof that, in its central core, medicine is an art, and not a science, than the kind of discussion that goes on at medical meetings. It exactly resembles the discussions that go on in political debating societies. The monotony of life was interrupted at frequent intervals by official inspections. Every General who passed up or down felt it incumbent on him to visit the hospital. A crowd of lean men in khaki, each with what looked like a large collection of stamps on

his left breast, a posse of Bengal Lancers, the warning note of the bugle, a sudden cessation of scrubbing and dusting in the wards, the temporary assumption of an intelligent air, of straps and leggings and tunics, a few explanations or carefully veiled suggestions, some hearty laughs, a popping of soda-water bottles in the mess, a receding cloud of dust on the plain—and the inspection was over.

One often wonders at this constant habit of official inspections, when an unofficial inspection, made by an able man who strolled in unannounced, would be so much more intelligent and valuable. It is almost painful to witness the preparation that goes on before an official visit. There is a suggestion of something archaic, something inferior to the spirit of life, in the whole process; as if one were not an actively employed hospital, up to the neck in honest work, but merely a

passive model on a large scale, in which everything was always in symmetrical rows, in which the patients were accustomed to be exactly parallel to the edges of their beds, in which everyone preferred to stand to attention if they could do so without dying. It was as if all the rough strong machinery of the place never went at full speed, but was carefully painted and polished until it looked like a musical box without a soul or a purpose.

These inspections were incessant and entirely suspended the work of the hospital while they lasted. When they occurred in the morning, it was necessary to hurry through the usual work, get everything cleaned up, assume full uniform, take all books, papers and games from the patients, and wait patiently for the arrival of the inspecting party. As often as not a message would come

after a long delay, to say that the inspection would be postponed until a later hour.

During September one of the native interpreters came into the venereal tent as a patient. At the time it was under my care. There was, by the way, very little venereal disease amongst the troops, though, of course, the country is full of it. He was a little olive Jewish boy, alert in manner, and muscular, and a good linguist. When war broke out he was living in Baghdad, where he had learned French and English at one of the Mission Schools there, for he was a Christian. When Turkey came in, he fled from Baghdad with many others who wished to avoid conscription. He travelled down the river to Basra. He described the journey as very bad, with little food and a constant fear of being caught. On reaching Basra he heard rumours of our coming expedition, but the

most extreme apathy existed in the town. The Turks were indifferent, walking about smoking cigarettes and " making the shoulders to rise a leetle " as they talked. But they kept a watchful eye on the Arabs. When the Turks evacuated Basra a panic ensued. He was living at the time in a merchant's house and they barricaded the doors and windows and got out any weapons they could find. The Arabs from the plains poured into the town and began to loot. They looted the customs house in particular, and other official places. He saw many street fights in the white dust under the glare of the sun, but he said it was usually the Arab looters fighting amongst themselves. Their fights would last a long time, the men circling round one another with knives, or sniping from street corners. There was a great deal of musket firing at night. This state of

lawlessness went on for three days, and then we made our first appearance in the form of a gun-boat that fired three rounds from one of her guns, "Not to hit something, but to make a salaam." The barricaded ones felt more comfortable. When the Sixth Division marched in he became smitten by the general appearance of these veterans, and hearing that interpreters were required, made an application and was accepted. He marched up with the Division to Kut, and eventually on to Ctesiphon. "It was such a peety," he remarked, "for we did all know perfectly well—for I had told them—that the inhabitants of Baghdad would destroy us themselves." I asked him what the city was like and if it was safe in peace times. "Oh, it is all the same in the whole country," he said. "It is all unsafe unless you theenk. You must always theenk a lot in this country,

and not be in a hurry." At Ctesiphon he said that our troops, a division strong, fought wonderfully and had beaten the Turks, who were far more numerous, but a fresh division from Constantinople arrived in time to alter the complexion of affairs. In the rout, he apparently managed to crawl on to a steamer full of wounded. It stuck on the way down and was surrounded by Arabs, who shouted from the darkness for them to surrender. They had a machine-gun and got through. The Arabs, he said, did not cause any trouble on our Lines of Communication until the retreat began, and then they began work with enthusiasm. At Kut he went through the siege. At the surrender he had the foresight to disguise himself as an Arab. The Turks hanged a lot of interpreters. He escaped and lay low, wondering how to get down the river. "The Turks did not treat the

British soldiers very well. The officers, oh, yes. But the men, no. There was leetle to eat." Two months later, when things were quieter, he went to a party of Arabs who were going down the river and made an offer. "I did not trust them, so I went to a Christian house and left three pounds there, and then I gave them three pounds and told them if I arrived safely I would write a letter and they could get the other money when they came back." The Arabs, finding no way of doing him in—after much thinking, I suppose—agreed and they set off. They went down the Shatt-el-Hai way, to the Euphrates, and after a lot of trouble, he got through to the British lines, where he resumed his duties as interpreter.

He was a curious mixture of daring and cowardice, like most of the natives in Mesopotamia. He was very pleased with the hospital,

but expressed a crafty sentiment. "You have too many hospitals," he said. "The Turks do not have these hospitals, for then all their men would become sick. It is nicer to be in a hospital than in a desert." This thought brings to the memory an incident that occurred in one of the wards. A new case was admitted, and next morning the doctor overhauled him. He found nothing wrong. "Well, what is the matter with you?" "There ain't nothing the matter," was the reply. "You see it's like this, sir. My pal Bill, in my platoon, he was out of 'orspital day before yesterday, and he says: 'Ginger, me boy, if you want a nice bed for ter sleep in, such as you've forgotten the sight of, you go into 'orspital.' So next day I reports myself sick, carrying on a lot and the new doctor what joined us last week, 'e sends me straight 'ere. And they washes

me all over, and tucks me up between the sheets, and I've 'ad the finest sleep since I came to this 'ere blooming country, sixteen months ago. And I'd be obliged, sir, if you'd discharge me."

A great many men suffered from bad teeth, and the suitable treatment of their cases became a problem. In the ordinary establishment of a general hospital, in the Army, there are about thirty medical officers, but no provision is made for dentists. In Mesopotamia decay of the teeth was rapid. Dentists in small numbers were sent from India. I hesitate to put down the amount that one dentist told me he was making each month. We had, for some time, only one dentist, and his waiting list was several hundred cases, all requiring urgent attention. Some of the bad cases became permanent base men—that is, they were attached for

duty at the base—and assisted in hospital work. If each hospital had had a dentist attached to it as a matter of routine, and a couple of mechanics for repairing dentures, receiving the same pay as a doctor, the problem of teeth, which is always troublesome, would have been to a considerable extent solved. I do not know why teeth decayed so rapidly. It may have been due to incipient scurvy, or to the nature of the rations, or to the general state of health, or it may have been caused by some septic condition of the mouth, induced by the heat and dryness. Some young fellows lost every tooth in their possession in a year. Hair suffered in the same way, but to a lesser extent. Some exhaustion of the thyroid gland may have been at the bottom of the trouble.

XI

EDEN REVISITED

TOWARDS the end of October the weather became cooler, and in November the nights were chilly. Sickness diminished rapidly. At this season there is a kind of charm about Mesopotamia. Clouds begin to inhabit the skies and the colour effects, especially those of dawn and sunset, are lovely. It is a time intermediate between the season of heat and the season of floods—a brief time, but one in which the country is at its best. Mosquitoes and sand-flies vanish. A lovely bird, a deep blue and russet, sings in the groves. The blue jay screams and darts through the palm-

trees. It is possible to understand how in the Eastern poets the beauty of women is constantly compared with the moon. It is the only thing to compare it to. In a country like Mesopotamia, with its entire lack of scenery, the moon in all her phases is by far the most beautiful thing that one sees. After the heat of the day, when the sun has seemed a destroyer rather than a fructifier, the slender crescent rising over the plain is like a girl dressed in silver. This poverty in nature must perplex the Mesopotamian artist. The only objects that the native jewellers etch into their silver work are Ezra's tomb, the native boat, the jackal, the palm tree and the camel. And that is about all the material the country yields. It is this simplicity that leaves only two courses open to the inhabitants. They must either fall back upon their senses and become sen-

sualists or seek a higher path and become mystics.

There is little love lost between the Indians and the Arabs. The Arabs in Mesopotamia have long feared the incursion of India into their country, for they knew that the Indian farmer under the British engineers would make Mesopotamia blossom like a rose. The swiftness with which seeds grow when properly watered is uncanny. We had a garden attached to the mess and watered by a variety of people. The first attempt was a failure owing to the absent-mindedness of the waterers, each of whom, during an exceedingly hot spell, tacitly assumed that the other man would do his duty. The second attempt was successful. Peas straight out of packets and scattered in a long furrow rose from the earth with a kind of ferocity, as if they hated the soil in which they found themselves. There was

one disadvantage in the produce of this garden—its flavour was rather weak.

Coming down the river at the end of the year the railway was a great new feature of the country. Small tank engines were crawling over the plain and all along the banks were piles of sleepers and gangs of Arabs. We reached the entrance of the Narrows at dusk and anchored for the night. It was a night that differed entirely from those we endured when going up. There was a concert party on board, and a cavalry major who possessed some tomato soup. That night the sky was superb with stars. Taurus rose, with Aldebaran as red as fire; then Castor and Pollux calm in their symmetry, with the Pleiades above like a shattered diamond. Then glittering Orion slowly swung above the horizon. In the middle of the night there was a crash of musketry, and a sudden uproar.

The major appeared, speaking Hindustani very rapidly, his eyes closed. It appeared that some Arabs had crept on to the barge next the shore and tried to loot some mail bags. Quiet was soon restored. At dawn a crescent moon, upholding Venus at her fairest, hung in the east, throwing a soft white flame over the dark water.

That night we reached Kurna and tied up alongside the Garden of Eden. It was pitch black. A string of little Arab boys suddenly emerged from a brightly illuminated door each with a sack and slipped on board. This was the mail for Basra, from the dwellers in Eden. About nine a dim, white-robed procession passed down the river-side with a lamp, a torch and a beating drum and vanished into a building. A wedding was being celebrated in the Garden of Eden. Next morning that bride of yesterday might have

cast her white veil over the scene. Through the clinging mist the life of the little hamlet gradually became visible. A café revealed itself, a collection of wooden settles in a small square, and beyond a big dark doorway. A fat Arab in yellow appeared and gazed at us. Then an old wizened fellow, a *haji* from his green turban showing he had seen Mecca, came up and they conversed. Green Turban was plainly lamenting. He pointed to our ship, to the telegraph-office, to a squad of Gurkhas marching past wearing their ration baskets as hats, and threw up his hands. The fat café proprietor shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the bazaar. His argument was plain. Business was good and he was content with the changes. Green Turban drew his robes closer round him, shook his head and went off, a sad, gaunt figure on whose face was stamped that ex-

pression which is common all the world over when new wine and old bottles make contact. As he passed up the bank a barge load of howitzers, their yellow muzzles gazing skywards, churned its way up stream.

The railway from Kurna to Amara was nearing completion towards the end of November. It is possible for vessels of considerable size to traverse the whole length of the Shatt-el-Arab up to its point of commencement at Kurna. The railway, so long in coming, will make a great difference to the troops in the country during the next hot season. For, with proper lines of communication and with properly equipped buildings for the sick and wounded, a great deal of the sufferings that were endured in the early stages of the campaign will be entirely done away with.

The major, a dreamy soul, while brooding

over the golden brown plain on our way down river, now and then sought to fathom the mystery of the country's future. As we left Kurna and entered the fair, broad-bosomed Shatt-el-Arab he suddenly swept his arm round the horizon. "All this show of ours out here is nothing in itself," he said. "It's a beginning of something that will materialise a hundred or two hundred or a thousand years hence. We are the great irrigating nation and that's why we're here now. We'll fix this land up and get it going and then far ahead all the agricultural produce which we made possible will move the wheels of a new humanity. Pray God, yes—a new humanity! One that doesn't stuff itself silly with whisky and beef and beer and die of apoplexy and high explosives."

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